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THE NEW COURSE AND THE SED REGIME IN THE GDR

Summary: The following information consists of excerpts from an article by Gerd Friedrich in SBZ Archiv of 5 March 1954, a Cologne publication containing reports and commentaries on all-German problems.

In addition to presenting an analysis of the political intentions, methods, and objectives of the SED (Socialist Unity Party) in carrying out the New Course, the article gives a general review of the effects of the policy of the New Course.

In instigating the new course, the intentions of the GDR government, with respect to internal policy, are to re-establish the power of the SED regime and to destroy the opposition of the masses in the GDR. With respect to over-all German policy, the purpose of the New Course is to prevent Bonn from adopting a more active Eastern policy and to preserve the GDR as a "bastion of German unity."

Execution of the Program of the New Course

Although the intensified class struggle has been temporarily discontinued in the GDR, the USSR remains "the shining example in the fight for peace, democracy, and socialism," as stated in the congratulatory address of the ZK (Central Committee of the SED) to the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) on the occasion of the 36th anniversary of the October Revolution. Although discussions are now supposedly being held in the People's Chamber, the Democratic Bloc, which binds the fellow-traveler parties to the SED, was revived on 21 September 1953. Some of the persons sentenced by Soviet military tribunals since May 1945 were granted amnesty on 16 January 1954. Prior to this time, however, the government had introduced "purge rallies" to liquidate the supporters of the 17 June 1953 uprisings in the plants. Although three of the most monotonous propaganda publications were discontinued on 30 November 1953, Oelssner a Secretary of the ZK of the SED, on the occasion of the 16th meeting of the ZK, stated that agitation against US imperialism would have to be considerably intensified. On 28 September 1953, the SED faction in the People's Chamber proposed that farmers who fled to West Germany be urged to return to their farms; however, according to the resolutions of the ZK which were announced on 26 January 1954, a kolkhoz is to be established in every agricultural community of the GDR in 1954.

The dangerous spirit of opposition could naturally not be eliminated through the re-establishment of state power and the withdrawal of concessions which were granted as a result of the events of 17 June 1953. Therefore, the Politburo of the SED decided on a number of measures to alleviate conditions in the economic and cultural spheres, the purpose of which was to pacify that part of the population not directly active in the 17 June uprisings by means of minor improvements in their standard of living.

To assure a smoother supply of the daily requirements for food and goods, the government could have restricted further collectivization and industrialization; for political reasons, however, the government could neither abandon the unprofitable kolkhozes in favor of the more productive private farms nor permit a restriction on the state monopoly in trade, a restriction which necessarily would have taken place if private initiative had been encouraged. Finally, the production of consumer goods could not be satisfactorily expanded, since the shortage of materials would have had detrimental effects on heavy industry, which, in turn, would have endangered the vital export program;

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moreover, the number of unemployed would have been increased (despite the mass exodus to the West, the number of unemployed had reached 1,100,000 <sup>[sic]</sup> by 30 June 1953). Thus, all measures proposed by the SED were intended more for their psychological effect than for their material effect.

Although the 1954 economic plan provides for a 25.2-percent increase in the production of consumer goods, the question still remains as to how this is ever to be accomplished in an industry in which, according to Ulbricht's speech at the 15th meeting of the FDGB (League of Free German Trade Unions) in November 1953, the rate of rejects is too high, and previous production quotas could not be fulfilled. The return of the 33 SAGs (Soviet Corporations) has only ~~theoretical~~ significance for the industrial capacity of the GDR, since the lack of materials, not the lack of plants, constitutes the major difficulty. The present requirements for the utilization of waste material from the production process are also of no help in overcoming the stagnation which set in after the temporary recourse to the state reserves was ended.

The expansion of the farmers' markets, which had already been introduced on 16 April 1953; the change in the organizational structure of state wholesale trade, which went into effect on 1 January 1954; the establishment of a State Secretariat for Local Industry on 26 November 1953; and the creation of a new Central Chamber of Industry and Trade on 6 August 1953 were all measures which aimed at tapping local reserves and expediting the circulation of goods. However, these measures did not solve the problems of the shortage of raw materials for industry and the shortage of food for the population. Thus, it was again necessary to take severe steps to force delivery of goods in arrears from consumers cooperatives and state and private agricultural enterprises. Above all, as was recently stated by Dr Lessing, president of the Chamber for Foreign Trade of the GDR, attempts had to be made to increase imports. To compensate somewhat for the limited delivery possibilities of the GDR, the government, on 29 October 1953, declared East marks as the most stable currency in the Orbit and placed them on the "gold standard." The advantages which the Pankow regime could thus derive from trade with non-Communist countries surpass by far the disadvantages which this manipulation has for the rest of the Satellite countries. The old exchange rate of two East marks to one ruble naturally remained in effect for <sup>[sic]</sup> transactions with the USSR, despite the fact that the actual ratio was 0.55:1.

On 28 November 1953, Otto Nuschke <sup>[sic]</sup> chairman of the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and a Deputy Minister President of the GDR <sup>[sic]</sup> appealed to the workers to show appreciation for the aid given by the USSR by overfulfilling the economic plans. This statement was a combination of economic nonsense and deliberate deceit, because the reparations obligations of the GDR, which were supposedly canceled on 1 January 1954, are being continued under the designation of "export orders." Furthermore, the extensive attempts to mobilize working women for the Frieda Hockauf Movement are not adequate for the solution of the economic problems of the regime. The slogan "Produce More" was apparently to be made more acceptable by such measures as the decision of 15 October 1953 to reduce income taxes for workers and office employees (tax rates for artisans were increased for 1954); the authorization of installment payments in furniture purchases (24 October 1953) and of Christmas bonuses amounting to from 10 to 40 East marks for workers and office employees; the sale of surplus stocks, i.e., drugs on the market, of the DHZ (German Trade Center) at very low prices; and the reduction in HO (Trade Organization) prices of certain items.

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The results of the system of erratic assistance practiced by the SED spoke for themselves. Not quite 11 million of the planned 16 million tons of potatoes were harvested; in November 1953, in Magdeburg and Dresden, many households had not yet received the promised winter-storage supplies. In a resolution of the Council of Ministers on 20 December 1953, the production status of the clothing and shoe industry was described as completely inadequate, and the Ministry of Foreign and Intra-German Trade was censured for not having supplied sufficient amounts of raw materials for the production of consumer goods. By Christmas, in Neubrandenburg, there was a shortage of bed linen, buckets, children's clothing, and handkerchiefs. The power cutoffs continued; as a result of the shortage of coal, the supply of gas had to be temporarily suspended in the Leipzig supply area at the end of January 1954.

Using tactics analogous to those in the economic field, the Politburo applied the New Course to the field of education and culture as if the increased supply of products of Soviet culture and the change in certain cultural methods, but not in their tendencies, were the only points open to debate. The campaign against the church has been dropped, insofar as it was conducted by the state; however, the FDJ (Free German Youth) continues to engage in atheistic "enlightenment." On 30 August 1953, the largest synagogue in Germany was opened in East Berlin; however, 2 months later, the theoretical organ of the ZK stated that the task of the party press was "to intensify the propagation of the doctrines of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin." On 19 October 1953, Grotewohl, referring to the intentions of the regime in the field of culture and art, stated, "We are not of the viewpoint that the New Course consists of decadent liberalism." At Grotewohl's conference on 30 October 1953, the GDR Writers' Association hastened to reject the demands, which were criticized by Grotewohl, for freedom of opinion and the equal rights of all artistic opinions. Furthermore, the Society for German-Soviet Friendship in East Berlin arranged a discussion on the party affiliations of actors, and the Association of Creative Artists, on the occasion of its annual exhibitions, informed its members that the new course was not a license for the painting of landscapes and still life. Finally, it was made clear in a speech to Leipzig publishers by Johannes R. Becher, GDR Minister of Culture, that also with respect to cultural policy, the New Course denoted the strengthening and consolidation of state power.

When the Ministry of Culture was established on 7 January 1954, the appointment of Becher and Abusch to head the new administration could be regarded by the populace as a guarantee that, in place of the unproductive but relatively "honest" Holzhauser methods, Holzhauser was chairman of the former State Commission for Arts, the hypocritical practitioners of the Cultural League were to be used for the bolshevization of intellectual life. That the decision of 6 August 1953 to enlarge the universities and schools of advanced education was in line with the policy of bolshevization was revealed by the fact that one of the first of the new institutes was a school of advanced education for producers cooperatives in Meissen.

#### The Status of the SED and the Mass Organizations

The SED, the main support of the GDR political system, has suffered such a loss in effectiveness that its significance as a political factor appears doubtful. Apart from the loss in key personnel such as Ackermann, Dahler, Herrnsdorf, and Zaisser, the Communist element in the basic units has been supplanted by "perpetually loyal" and actually unreliable opportunists, as a result of the purge which followed the 17 June uprisings. The party management, which were newly staffed, chiefly with postwar Communists and FDJ functionaries, instigated such mass liquidations of tried, old Communists that even the Politburo, at a special meeting on 12 October 1953, considered it unnecessary to further decimate the functionary apparatus. However, the Soviet occupation authorities, apparently in consideration of the disclosure of a campaign in some organizations (in Altenburg, Goerlitz, Niesky, Zittau) to split the party, designated the preceding purge as completely inadequate. Thus, the fight to destroy "Social Democratic factions" continued in November 1953.

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The fact that the number of party members dropped from 1.4 million in September 1952 to 1.2 million (including candidates) in September 1953 was less serious than the failure of the recruiting campaign, which was started in November 1953. In East Berlin, the quota for party applicants was not even 2 percent fulfilled. However, the change in the social structure of the SED is of even greater significance; the reduction in the percentage of workers [who are SED members] in Magdeburg, for example, to 35.5 percent and in East Berlin to 30 percent meant the greater isolation of the party from the "working masses." This is the exact opposite of what was to have been attained after the 17 June uprisings.

The internal party work revealed signs of extensive paralysis. Although the fourth [party] school year is to be conducted only during the period from 1 October 1953 to 31 May 1954, only 60 percent of the registered participants had appeared in the study groups by mid-October 1953. As was the case in Pappendorf, members in the basic units of the party simply refused to study Marxism-Leninism because they wanted to remain Socialists. *Das Volk*, the Weimar SED newspaper, reported on 16 December 1953 that many party organizations refused to accept indoctrination literature, especially the Stalin volumes. The Kreis Malchin management had promised to furnish 40 propagandists to enlighten the populace on the Four Power Conference; however, only six comrades participated in the training classes. *Taegliche Rundschau* [organ of the Soviet Army in the GDR] reported that, on the average, three fourths of all party members did not attend party meetings during October 1953. According to the October 1953 report of the Bezirk Dresden management to the ZK, those members who did attend party meetings, for the most part, could no longer be induced to participate in discussions on current problems; if they did speak, they found fault with the party and the government.

The conditions in the association allegedly representing the interests of the workers are proof of even less strength. The FDGB, which at one time had 5.5 million paying members, was reduced to 5 million members up to the time of the 17 June uprisings; after the uprisings, the FDGB experienced membership losses which amounted to 25 percent in some key enterprises. At the end of October 1953, scarcely one third of the East Berlin construction-enterprise workers were still FDGB members; in some districts, only 10-15 percent of these members were still paying their dues. An organization which, to retain its membership strength, must resort to such measures as the sick-fund regulation of 2 November 1953 -- according to which the duration of financial aid increases with the number of years the employee has been an FDGB member -- cannot possibly be in a position to regain control over the workers, much less mobilize them for the goals of the SED.

Symptoms of decline in the FDJ were confirmed as early as spring 1953. The organization was weakened further by the June uprisings and the September adventure [reference to failure to influence West German elections?], so that, up to the present, every initiative of the Central Council has flagged at the level of the Kreis managements. According to [Karl] Schirdewan [member of the Politburo of the SED], there were no longer any propaganda lectures or ideological discussions in the FDJ. In August 1953 [Erich] Honecker [Chairman of the FDJ] announced to the Central Council that about 250,000 functionaries and members of the FDJ were to be considered reliable, but, at a meeting in November 1953, Gerhard Neukrantz [not further identified] stated that only 125,000 could be relied on. If the participation in the FDJ school year in January 1954 is to serve as a criterion, barely 100,000, or exactly 10 percent, of the FDJ members at least did not sabotage the directives of the Central Council.

Every analysis of the mass organizations confirms the impression that they are so occupied with their own affairs that they can give very little attention to the implementation of the party course. Even the newly established SSD (State Security Service) troop units cannot change this situation and its consequences.

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Reaction of the Populace

Although the GDR regime succeeded in wresting the initiative from the opposing masses, it was unable to liquidate the resistance movement.

It must have been a disturbing sign for the SED that despite the continuous arrests during the months of October, November, and December 1953, in connection with the June uprisings, the number of persons fleeing to West Berlin did not increase, as would have been expected. Moreover, the outcome of the Month of German-Soviet Friendship proved that the attitude of the populace was beginning to stiffen again. According to the final report of the Central Executive of the Society for German-Soviet Friendship, those persons assigned as agitators constantly encountered anti-Soviet tendencies. About 80 percent of the friendship rallies planned in central Germany had to be canceled because of the lack of audiences; despite the fact that in the major plants these events were carefully arranged to occur during working hours they were frequently boycotted, with the excuse being given that it was necessary to overfulfill the second 6-month plan.

According to the 6 January 1954 issue of the Rostock *Vstseezeitung*, an SED organ, the work of the "class enemy" has supposedly shifted to agricultural areas, and the resolution of the 17th meeting of the ZK admitted that the enemy was still occupying positions in villages, especially in the Bezirke Frankfurt, Dresden, Cottbus, and Schwerin. Difficulties encountered by the SED in the field of agriculture include the desertion of LPGs (Agricultural Producers Cooperatives) by farmers and the election of kulaks and opponents of cooperatives to the VdgB (Farmers Mutual Aid Society) managements in the Bezirke Magdeburg, Potsdam, and Rostock.

The workers by no means have exhibited a friendlier attitude toward the SED system. The party campaign for the collection of signatures to demand the admission of German delegates to the Foreign Ministers' Conference, as well as the endorsement of Molotov's proposals for Germany, provoked the first open demonstrations of protest since July 1953. Workers in the Boehlen Combine expressed the opinion that the Four Power Conference was to no avail in any case; SED agitators in Kreis Rathenow were thrashed; the majority of the workers at the Hennigsdorf Steel Plant sabotaged the signature campaign; leaflets bearing the slogan "Free Elections" appeared at the Berlin Incandescent Lamp Factory; and workers in Leuna and Bautzen, employees of the Leipzig main railroad station, and workers of the Miles Works machine tool plant in Berlin demanded free elections.

The apprehension expressed by Muechke in mid-January 1954 concerning a new "coup" during the Four-Power Conference, as well as the continued restriction of travel from the GDR to East Berlin, were proof that the Pankow regime fears the true opinion of its subjects under the present conditions. Schirde-  
wan's statement to the ZK, namely, that a considerable number of GDR youths are indifferent or opposed to the development of the SED system, also applies to the majority of all people in the GDR. The situation of the SED regime in February 1954 does not indicate that the New Course will fulfill its purpose in the GDR.

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